

Kandahar's Supply Hub

Story and Photos by SSG Alberto Betancourt

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As Kandahar's clear skies slowly transformed into a kaleidoscope of orange, yellow and purple, SPC Gerald Gorman knew it was ...

"show time!"

"I could have twice as many forklifts and still not have enough," said LTC Thomas Pirozzi, commander of the 626th FSB.



(Above) Local Afghans help 101st Abn. Div. soldiers erect tents on the grounds of Kandahar Airport.



(Left) SSG Noveless Wimberly ground-guides PFC Moedjirah Vandellie, whose forklift bears supplies to be distributed to the soldiers of the 101st.

"However, we earn our real money at night."

The 10,000-pound Atlas forklift Gorman drives is a vital commodity for the support team.

"I could have twice as many forklifts and still not have enough," said LTC Thomas Pirozzi, commander of the 626th FSB. "This piece of equipment is integral in getting as many supplies as possible on the ground to complete the mission."

Besides keeping the airport's runway clear while unloading supplies from incoming Air Mobility Command C-17s, Pirozzi's soldiers must distrib-

CPT Daniel Carrera, commander of HHC, 2nd Bn., 187th Inf., was scheduled to give up command two weeks before his troops deployed to Afghanistan.

ute the supplies among the different units inside the compound.

He said at times the mission is challenging because of the difficulties of getting the supplies into the country. Yet, the great working relationship his soldiers have with the division's 3rd Brigade Combat Team keeps the mission flowing.

"We're an integral part of the 3rd BCT," he said. "We train with them in garrison, in the field and when we're deployed."

Pirozzi said his soldiers were well trained to support Operation Enduring Freedom's mission in Afghanistan.

At Fort Campbell, his battalion spends six weeks supporting the installation and 12 weeks preparing for deployment. The cycle ends with another intensified six weeks of training.

"My soldiers do this all the time," he said. "Our tactical mission is not much different from our garrison mission — the locations just change."

Besides unloading planes and distributing food, barrier material, medications and ammunition to the units, the 626th is also responsible for purifying water.

"It's one thing to produce, purify and store the water," Pirozzi said. "The real challenge is getting the water to the soldiers' canteens."

PV2 Damien Franklin, a water-purification specialist with the 801st Main Support Bn. at Fort Campbell, is attached to the 626th in Afghanistan. He is one of the four soldiers responsible for the water-purification mission.

He said two 600-gallon Reverse



Soldiers



The constant flow of supplies into Kandahar keeps the 101st soldiers busy 24 hours a day.

Osmosis Water Purification Units are used in a three-step process to purify water drawn from local wells.

"The water comes out cleaner than bottled water," Franklin said. "We've already purified more than 75,000 gallons."

Supporting the 626th's extensive logistical mission are Task Force Rakkasans soldiers from Headquarters and HQs. Company, 2nd Bn., 187th Infantry.

"We are the liaison between line soldiers and the support battalion," said SSG Irving Williams, HHC's support-platoon sergeant. "We know what our infantrymen need and we make sure they get it. When they see our soldiers approaching their bunkers, they smile because they know we have what they need."

Williams said that because the defensive operation in Afghanistan is huge, an equally large amount of lumber and wire was needed.

CPT Daniel Carrera, HHC's commander, said his philosophy is to have the battalion's soldiers perform their mission "without worrying about supplies."

Carrera, who was scheduled to relinquish command of the unit two weeks prior to its deployment to Afghanistan, pleaded for the opportu-



SSG Irving Williams, platoon sergeant for HHC's support platoon, greets local Afghans who will help him download supplies. Some locals are permitted to work inside the Task Force Rakkasans' compound.

nity to accompany his soldiers on this mission.

"I've been their commander for almost two years," he said. "I wanted to be with them during this important mission. I'm very proud and grateful I got the chance."

Meanwhile, silhouetted against the

evening sky, Gorman stacked another pallet of supplies. As darkness formed a blanket over Kandahar, the stockpile grew.

"When the sun comes out we'll clear this up," said Gorman. "And tomorrow evening we'll pack it up again." □